

Seattle Monorail Project

Position Paper Number One

System-wide Design

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Seattle Planning Commission

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Introduction

On December 17, 2001, staff and members of the Seattle Design Commission, Seattle Planning Commission, Seattle Arts Commission, Historic Preservation Program, CityDesign, Elevated Transportation Company (ETC), and consultants met to identify and discuss important system-wide design and planning issues related to ETC's proposed Seattle Monorail project.

This was the first in a series of three collaborative work sessions. In the second session, on January 23, 2002, Commissioners further examined system-wide design, planning issues and route options. A third session was held on March 13, 2002 and focused on station design issues. This paper reports on the outcome of the first two work sessions.

The Seattle Planning Commission and Seattle Design Commission, sponsors of the work sessions, are committed to providing constructive advice to the ETC and the City regarding the planning and design aspects of the proposed monorail project. The Commissions had early briefings on the project in the summer of 2001, and began collaborating in the review of the Seattle Monorail project in the fall 2001. Their individual and joint efforts so far have resulted in the following products:

- *Minutes of the Planning Commission (07/14/01) and Seattle Design Commission (07/19/01 and 11/15/01)*
- *Joint comments on the ETC's Design Guidelines (03/11/02)*

This position paper does not represent an endorsement of the monorail project overall. Rather, the shared goal of the Commissions is to ensure that the proposed elevated transit system, if it is endorsed and funded, will meet community development goals and urban design principles. The Commissions want to help the ETC and the City of Seattle anticipate planning needs and identify potential design and community relations issues. More important, the Commissions seek to identify opportunities for the ETC to create a monorail system which functions effectively as part of the city's overall transportation system and serves Seattle's sense of civic pride and neighborhood character.

It should be noted that this paper does not address broader planning issues, such as the ETC's potential contribution to the city's neighborhood planning and growth management goals. These broader issues will be the focus of a subsequent position paper developed by the Planning and Design Commissions later this Spring of 2002.

Staff and members of the Commissions and the ETC set forth the following goals for the work sessions:

- To understand the implications of specific design and alignment decisions on future elements of the system; and
- To discuss basic choices that will affect how the system will fit into neighborhoods.
- To discuss how decisions will serve the city's—and region's—transportation needs overall;
- To develop conclusions in the form of formal advice and position papers related to planning and design aspects of the elevated transit system.

The Planning and Design Commissions frequently collaborate to offer their extensive experience as advisors on a range of projects, including Sound Transit's Link Light Rail, neighborhood plans, and numerous site-specific projects throughout the City. They have appreciated the excellent information presented by ETC staff and consultants about a range of topics relating to monorail technology. The work sessions were facilitated by Design Commission Director John Rahaim and Planning Commission Director Marty Curry. All participants contributed to the discussions.

The following pages summarize the recommendations that resulted from Work Session #1 and Work Session #2. They are organized as follows:

- I. Suggested Principles to Guide Design of the Monorail
- II. Positions/Recommendations on Specific Corridors and Route Options
- III. Suggested Principles for Working with the City and the Community

These recommendations are offered in the spirit of providing constructive advice to the ETC and City as both tackle a multitude of decisions before and after the public vote in November 2002.

I. Suggested Principles to Guide Design of the Monorail System

Recommendations that have emerged from the Planning Commission and Design Commission in their review of the project so far consist of the following:

Make sure the monorail serves the city's and region's transportation needs.

The ETC must show how the monorail will connect with other modes of travel if the system is to succeed as part of a greater transportation system.

- As a regional resource, the system must connect seamlessly with city buses, Sound Transit, ferries, and other travel modes.
- The Monorail should not replace existing bus service. The City and ETC should obtain a firm commitment that existing Metro resources be made available for use as neighborhood circulators and feeder support to the monorail system.
- Transfers between modes of travel should be easy and, whenever possible, require no street crossings.
- Schedules must be predictable and coordinated.
- Signage and access points should encourage public use.

The monorail must serve pedestrians both functionally and aesthetically.

By its nature, the monorail could present an appealing transit alternative to support the City's goals of increasing pedestrian mobility. Effectively designed, the monorail could provide more pedestrian activity around station areas and increase opportunities to travel without a car.

- The system must include clear and comprehensive wayfinding so people can negotiate through and around the system.
- Wayfinding can include signs, but should also use design and art to communicate location and direction through the physical elements of the system itself.
- Design of the system should defer to pedestrians at eye level. In general, the Commissions encourage the ETC to approach system elements at eye-level as a pedestrian resource while elements that can be viewed from a distance should be designed as part of the civic infrastructure.

Begin planning for ground-level design and landscaping now. Recognize these elements as essential to the core station and system-wide program, and not simply enhancements.

Landscaping and streetscape design can help alleviate the negative visual impact of the monorail at the ground level, greatly enhancing the pedestrian experience and the experience of those who are neighbors to the monorail. Special consideration should be given to design and landscaping around downtown stations where the impacts will be more pronounced given the density, scale, and proximity of adjacent development.

- In general, planning and design for the ground-level experience should be part of early overall design of the system. Many landscaping elements will depend upon both design and engineering considerations. These should be coordinated.
- Review operational and equipment decisions for potential impact on landscaping and streetscape design.
- Retain mature trees where possible, especially in the city center.

- Similarly, reduce the size of power substations and other ancillary structures by accommodating them within larger structures or, if possible, underground.
- Where it is not possible to accommodate these power-related services within larger structures, the Commissions recommend they be sited in a manner that minimizes their visual impact.
- The Commissions recommend the ETC develop a comprehensive art plan soon in order to capture opportunities at stations and between stations during the design phase.
- The Commissions also recommend that the ETC integrate artists into the design team to ensure that art is not an afterthought. Planning for the funding of art should begin soon as well.
- The ETC should fund art at 1% as required for City projects.

The design must minimize visual and social impacts, and maximize benefits.

- Column placement should be designed to be flexible in order to fit particular conditions and locations.
- The height of the guideway should not be fixed, but flexible to adopt to conditions.
- Columns should be designed as integral elements of the streetscape, and include other features, such as kiosks, where appropriate.
- The guideway should be designed with a minimum of structure, and the materials could vary by neighborhood if appropriate

The monorail should be an expression of civic architecture while supporting neighborhood character.

While the monorail project should offer an accessible and interesting experience for people navigating in and around the system, it should also be viewed as a significant expression of civic architecture—particularly when viewed from a distance.

- The Commissions encourage the ETC to incorporate a consistent design vocabulary throughout the system, while allowing neighborhood character to be expressed by station location and by uses in and around the stations.
- The proposed monorail system assumes the use of current technology. Yet important trade-offs must be considered regarding the scale of the guideway and columns to balance system efficiency and identity and neighborhood character.
- While the monorail system needs to read as a whole, design elements can be used to tailor system features to each neighborhood.
- Likewise, technological solutions may be necessary to address site-specific conditions such as the use of steel beam structures rather than concrete, in view corridors.

The monorail system must recognize and respect historic resources

- When assessing impacts to historic resources consider height, views to and from properties, level of noise, amount of construction debris and dirt, consistency of design, viability of historic district during construction and marketability of space.
- The commissions recommend that the ETC meet with the State Office of Archaeology and Historic Preservation to create a memorandum of agreement outlining mitigation measures.
- Begin coordination with appropriate federal agencies to identify issues relating to historic preservation that will be factors in accepting federal dollars for construction.
- Do not provide false historicism. New architecture should be compatible with historic properties and districts without copying/mimicking an historical style.

II. Positions/Recommendations on Specific Corridors and Route Options

The following section reflects planning and design observations the Commissions offer regarding specific corridor and route alternatives:

North Corridor (Ballard to Seattle Center)

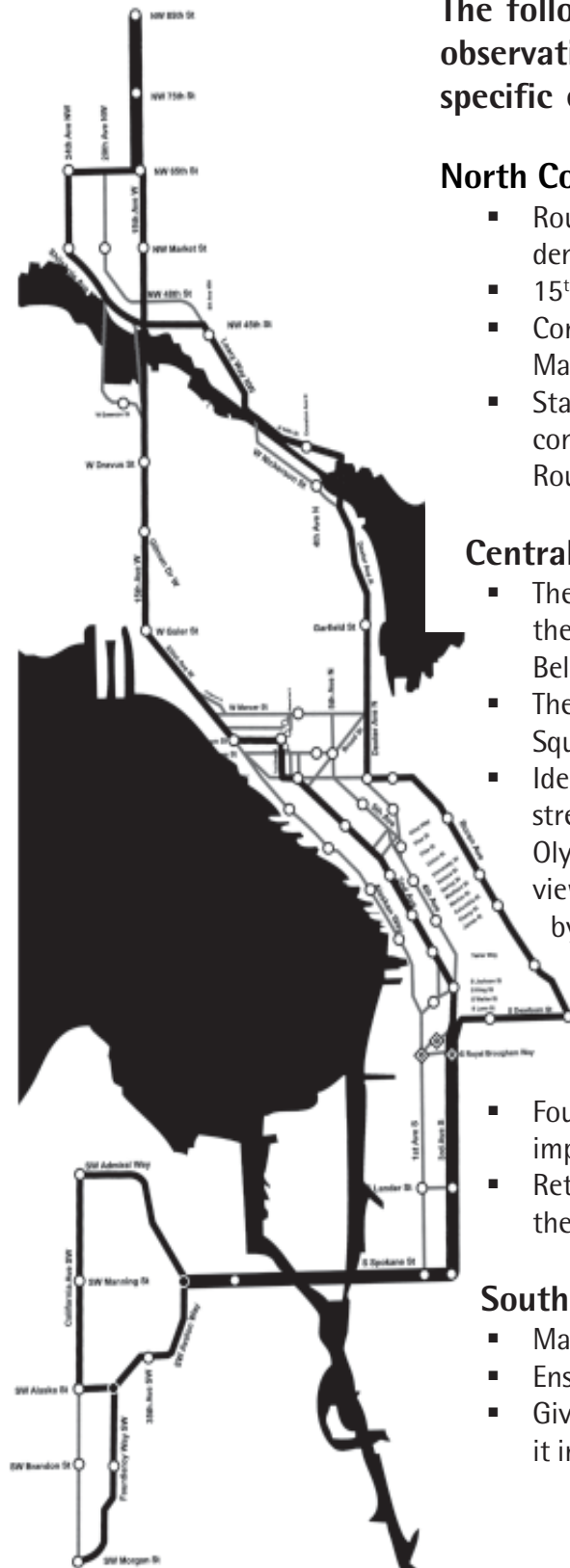
- Route could serve as a catalyst for higher residential density.
- 15th Avenue NW may be the most logical route.
- Consider increased development on 24th and 15th/NW Market Street.
- Station at West Emerson should emphasize intermodal connections to Seattle Pacific University and Transit Routes.

Central Corridor (Downtown)

- The 2nd Avenue route through the downtown core may be the best option, but this is not necessarily true through Belltown.
 - The 2nd Avenue route will significantly impact Pioneer Square.
 - Identify key view corridors in this area: most east-west streets have significant views of Elliott Bay and the Olympics. Using Fourth Avenue may better in terms of view protection, but several blocks are owned by the University of Washington. The role of the University should be considered.
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- Fourth Avenue through Pioneer Square will significantly impact the Civic Center Master Plan.
 - Retain First Hill among route options for examination in the EIS.

South Corridor (South Downtown to West Seattle)

- Make King Street a central intermodal connection.
- Ensure convenient stadium connections.
- Give special consideration to the design of the system as it intersects with SR 519.



III. Suggested Principles for Working with the City and the Community

The Commissions recognize that the ETC is carefully considering its strategies for communicating with the community and the City as it makes decisions regarding design, alignment and financing. They commend the ETC's commitment to a decision-making and design process that is accessible to observers and participants alike. In the spirit of retaining the public's confidence, the Commissions offer the following principles to guide these efforts:

Help people understand the Seattle Monorail Project by providing the information necessary to understand the key trade-offs and choices to be made among system, corridor, route and station alternatives.

Everyone wants the monorail to be well-designed, serve many people, and have a positive effect on the areas it serves. Reaching a preferred alternative with an acceptable budget will require making difficult trade-offs over the coming months. Voters will support the final monorail proposal only if they are confident that the compromises made along the way are sensible and still meet core transit and community goals. The community needs information that illustrates the challenges of designing the system and explains how decisions are being made so they will understand and support the final project proposal.

Provide visual images of what the system will look and feel like in the community.

While illustrations from other cities help people understand monorail technology in general, it is a different matter to understand—and support—monorail as it interacts with the community here at home. People need pictures and other images to allow them to see and understand what the system will look like on specific streets, from adjacent buildings, from a block or more away, down corridors, and at street crossings. Provide models where possible.

Show what is and is not a part of the planned system.

The Commissions strongly encourage the ETC to identify, in visual and written format, exactly which elements are part of the system and which elements are not. By identifying details of the system such as landscaping or placement of infrastructure elements, the community can offer feedback as to their priorities when compromises are needed.

Broaden the array of options for public involvement.

Workshops, forums and websites are excellent tools for communicating with the public. However, they often appeal to many of the same people. Other techniques should be used to broaden the spectrum of people involved. These include surveys (in person, phone), presentations at schools, and focus groups. Make sure to target likely transit users, including elderly, youth, disabled, and low-income populations.

Let people know they are heard.

People need to know that the ETC hears what they have to say. Letters to individuals and groups, public service announcements, reports to the City Council, and other forums provide opportunities to tell how the ETC is responding to feedback from the community.

Work out an agreement with the City for future, ongoing design reviews and include these mechanisms in public involvement plan.

The Commissions would like to clarify the role they might play in future reviews of the Monorail project, after the vote, and will work with City staff to identify the optimal mechanism and appropriate resources to ensure a vital ongoing role.

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Commission History and Mission

Design Commission

The Seattle Design Commission was established in 1968 to ensure that the citizens of Seattle benefit from the highest level of design excellence and livability in the city's public buildings and open spaces. This nine-member Commission provides professional, multidisciplinary design expertise to the Mayor, City Council and the City at large.

Planning Commission

The Seattle Planning Commission is an independent body that advises the Mayor, City Council, and City departments on planning policies and physical development plans and projects. The SPC was established by City Charter and has 15 members who are Seattle residents. The Commission's work is framed by the Comprehensive Plan and its vision for Seattle into the 21st Century, and by a commitment to engaging citizens in the work of planning for and working to reach these goals.

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